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ABSTRACT

A public school district in Colorado initiated a study which addressed the issue of how to insure good beginnings for new teachers and provide direct assistance and intervention to develop the skills of competent professionals. The approach discussed here is a beginning teacher induction program, which includes a Professional Development Seminar. A semi-structured setting was provided to 11 beginning and new-hire teachers who were encouraged and expected to talk about teaching. The intent of the discussions was threefold: (1) to decrease feelings of isolation; (2) to integrate research-based knowledge with practical knowledge about teaching; and (3) to move toward a professional conceptualization and understanding of teaching as both art and science. For evaluation purposes, the seminars were audio-recorded and each participant interviewed according to a standard set of questions. Findings suggest that teachers developed collegial relationships with group members, became aware of research based findings and addressed the difficulties of being a novice. It was also found that barriers of isolation were broken down, a greater understanding of teaching was achieved, experiences were shared and discussed, and reflection was encouraged. (LL)

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A Seminar Experience:
Effects of Teacher Talk on
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A Seminar Experience:

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"Your first year teaching can be the worst year in your life if you let it be because...you have all this energy and enthusiasm but you have none of the skills."

This statement from a new-to-the-district second year teacher reflects the concern of many beginning teachers as they attempt to move from the role of "student" to that of "teacher", often struggling to develop good classroom management and effective instructional skills. Findings from research studies on the perceived problems of beginning teachers indicate new teachers struggle primarily with student discipline issues, but are also concerned with learning how to motivate students and with ways to deal with individual differences (Veenman, 1984). Odell (1986) suggests beginning teachers need several kinds of support to become effective including (1) system information, (2) help identifying and locating resources and materials, (3) instructional and emotional support, (4) help with classroom management and room arrangements, and (5) the opportunity to observe effective teaching practices (p. 27). The studies are all consistent on two points: beginning teachers experience difficulty and need help and support to develop effective skills in classroom management and instruction.

Further, there is increasing evidence that beginning teachers do not possess the same skills and understandings about classroom life as more experienced teachers do. Recent studies of beginning and outstanding teachers indicate differences in how "experts" and beginners perceive, understand, and remember information about classroom events and in the solution strategies they propose for classroom problem solving (Carter, Sabers, Cushing, Pennigar, and Berliner, 1987; Sabers, Cushing, and Berliner, in press). Based on these research findings and grounded in the theories of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), Berliner

(1989) has proposed a five stage developmental theory of pedagogical expertise as one moves from beginning teacher to competent professional to expert.

Insert Table 1 About Here

According to Berliner the novice, or beginner, is often overcome by management issues and follows context-free rules in the hope of maintaining some measure of classroom control. Novices often feel alone (isolated) and unsure of themselves, and have little time for reflection about their day-to-day experiences. Progress to the next developmental stage, that of Advanced Beginner, is by trial and error. Advanced beginners build up case knowledge about teaching, and begin to develop strategic knowledge--the knowledge of when to ignore or break rules and when to follow them. Glaser (1986) suggests it is only after many repetitions of similar teaching events that novices and advanced beginners develop the necessary skills to be considered Competent Professionals (the third stage). A smaller number of teachers move on to become Proficient, and even fewer become Expert teachers.

What are the skills of competent professionals? Griffin (1986) rephrases the question, "What is good teaching? Who is the effective teacher?" (p. 1) and responds,

> A good teacher is well-organized, alert to classroom events, concerned abut classroom groups as well as about individuals, and skillful in the management of a complex social system....class members' views are solicited and actively listened to. There are opportunities for students to work independently and in both small and large groups....the environment can be characterized as orderly, friendly, attractive, and, with occasional planned exceptions, academically purposeful. (p. 5)

Berliner (1989) makes two important points about teachers who are competent performers:

> First, they make conscious choices about what they are going to do. They set priorities and decide on plans....they can determine what is and what is not important. [Second they] tend to feel more responsible for what happens....they are often emotional about their success and failure in a way that is different and more intense than that of novices or advanced beginners...but the competent performer is not yet very fast, fluid, or flexible in his or her behavior. (p. 42)

The issue, then, is how to insure good beginnings for new teachers and provide direct assistance and intervention which will help them in developing the skills of competent teachers. Sabers, et al. (in press) suggest that "opportunities to observe classrooms and reflect upon and discuss those observations with 'experts' might contribute to the development of those skills" (p. 43). One way to provide opportunities for observation, discussion, and reflection is probably through teacher induction programs. Across the country, the call for educational reform has included an emphasis on increasing the standards for teacher education programs and teacher certification. In part as a response to both the reform movement and the recognition that teaching is difficult, teacher induction programs are emerging as one means of providing support to beginning teachers as they struggle to become competent professionals. These induction programs take a variety of forms; many include some sort of mentoring relationship and some involve university course work. Although little research is available on the effectiveness of induction programs it could certainly be argued that any help is better than no help!

During the 1988-89 school year, Pueblo (Colorado) School District No. 60 initiated a teacher induction program which included a Professional Development Seminar to better meet the needs of beginning teachers. The program is continuing into its third year, and evaluation data from first and second year participants suggest the seminar experience is helping to break down feelings of isolation and is focusing attention on reflective practices.

The Professional Development Seminar

Participants

Eleven beginning and "new-to-the-district" teachers were selected to participate in the Professional Development Seminar during the initial year (1988-89) and continued to participate as second-year District No. 60 teachers during the 1989-90 school year. Although a second group began as new seminar participants during the 1989-90 school year, this manuscript will focus on the first year group, reporting two years of data from those eleven "new-hire" teachers. Participation was not voluntary (teachers were randomly assigned to one of three induction experiences), but teachers were provided released time for all seminar meetings. Seminar meetings were facilitated by two central office administrators, both of whom have recognized expertise in classroom instruction and management as well as demonstrated leadership and group facilitation skills.

Of the eleven seminar participants who comprised the first year group, there were eight females and three males ranging in age from their early twenties to mid-forties. Five were in their first year of teaching, three were in their second year of teaching, and the remaining three had approximately 12 to 15 years of teaching experience but were new to the district. Eight of the participants were elementary school teachers, two taught at the middle school level, and one (a physical education teacher) was assigned to the elementary setting in the morning (at two different buildings) and to a high school setting in the afternoon.

Procedures

The seminar meetings were held five times during the 1988-89 school year. Due to budget constraints and scheduling problems all of the meetings took place during the second semester of the school year. During the 1989-90 school year participants met five times throughout the school year.

The seminar provided a semi-structured setting in which teachers were encouraged and expected to talk about teaching. The intent of the seminar-discussions was threefold:

(1) to decrease feelings of isolation and to establish a means whereby teachers could share their questions and concerns about teaching and learn from one another, (2) to integrate research-based knowledge with practical knowledge about teaching, and (3) to move toward a professional conceptualization and understanding of teaching as both art and science.

Seminar group members were all provided a copy of Talks to Teachers (Berliner and Rosenshine, 1987). This book (which includes chapters from a variety of established researchers on such topics as classroom management, explicit teaching, opportunity to learn, and the power of educational research findings) was intended to serve as the basis for discussions about the teaching profession and the application of research to practice. Participants were also provided with written information on the Florida Performance Measurement System which included a description of and examples from research findings on teacher behaviors correlated with student achievement (Peterson et al., 1983). An important aspect of the seminar experience included modeling of teaching methodology by seminar facilitators. They taught mini-lessons focusing on educational research findings and purposefully asked questions for clarification to kindle thought and problem solving rather than simply providing answers. Evaluation Procedures

To evaluate the effectiveness of the seminar several of the seminar sessions were audio-recorded and at the end of the school year each seminar group member was interviewed according to a standard set of questions. Audio-recordings of these interviews and of the seminar sessions were typed for analysis.

Interview protocols were independently read and coded by all authors. Authors then met to share and agree upon a coding schema. Interviews were coded according to the following major themes: feelings, vocabulary and language, sharing and collegiality, questions, research concepts, and reflection. When appropriate codes and categories were subdivided or combined. For example, the category "feelings" was subdivided to include "my feelings", "what others feel", and "changes"; the category "questions" was subdivided

to included "questions about procedures or policies", "questions about classroom management", "questions about instruction", and "questions about how to improve". Themes and patterns were identified and protocols were re-read to verify those themes and to search for additional support (or negative examples). All researchers agreed on the predominant themes and, in most cases, selected the same examples for inclusion in this manuscript.

At the end of the second year eight of the eleven seminar participants were again interviewed and a second protocol analysis, similar to that described above, was undertaken by the researchers. The three seminar participants who were not interviewed participated in a stimulated recall experience. These three teachers taught a lesson to their students which was video-taped and then used as stimulation material for data collection. Immediately after teaching, participants viewed the video tape and were instructed to stop the tape and "talk about why you decided to do what you did". Their verbalizations, as they watched themselves teaching, were audio recorded and typed for protocol analysis. For this analysis the following codes were identified and agreed upon by the researchers: student behavior, teacher behavior, instructional technique, and management technique. Again, codes were subdivided and data were searched to identify positive and negative examples of themes and patterns.

Evaluation Results and Discussion

Evaluation findings from these two years of professional discussions fall into three categories: (1) information about teaching, (2) issues of isolation and collegiality, and (3) conceptualizations of teaching as a profession. Each finding is explained below, with selected exemplars from participant interviews or the stimulated recall provided as supportive evidence. There is a wealth of exemplars which can be found in the data; however, the sample size is small and the data analysis is interpretative in nature; therefore,

the conclusions drawn should be regarded as tentative. Still, the findings presented here are worth serious consideration and should be the source of further investigations.

Information About Teaching

Participants in the Professional Development Seminar viewed the seminar as a means of gaining more information about teaching. Seminar participants viewed the meetings as a time to ask questions and gather procedural information as well as a time to share ideas and techniques for teaching. Although there were a few questions about district procedures ("How do I get a sub?", "When do I have to sign up for insurance?") most of the initial discussion focused on where to find materials or on ideas about how to teach a particular content area. For many of these new teachers it appeared that since they were no longer in the context of "student teaching", they were without a supervising teacher of whom they could ask questions. These teachers reported they had not been assigned a "buddy" teacher or mentor in their buildings and thus they perceived that they had no one from whom to glean procedural information, or with whom to share ideas or ask questions about teaching. Therefore, they used the seminar for such procedural purposes. During seminar meetings participants shared ideas about instructional content and delivery, classroom activities and organizational methods, and art activities. The seminar also provided the opportunity for participants to expand their knowledge and understanding of teaching by the acquisition of new concepts and the vocabulary that explains and defines those concepts. The following examples from seminar participant protocols support these conclusions:

> **SP 3**: [Now I] organize my classes just a little bit differently. [I got] some ideas on planning....classroom management skills, and organizational kinds of procedures.
>
> **SP 4**: You might get people to tell you 'was that closure or is this closure?' or 'Was that motivation or transition time?"...all of these things are now a little more refined....I learned about maximizing time...and about management, setting directions

clearer, about giving more opportunity for success, about [using] short steps with immediate responses.

SP 5: I plan differently now...I plan for behavior disruptions...in my mind I'm becoming aware of my planning.

SP 7: We were able to share and exchange ideas. You know lots of times people tend to hold their ideas close to their heart and not be willing to share with you. So this was a really nice experience because you did pick up skills and different techniques from other people.

Over a period of time, the number of questions about district procedures and classroom management decreased and seminar facilitators began to hear the use of more and more sophisticated educational vocabulary. The concepts of reinforcement, wait time, and classroom management were discussed with group peers on a regular basis. For example,

SP 11: I found out things I didn't know, and we could [ask questions]...Now I review all the time, reinforce a lot of things, I wait at least 5 seconds, I make sure that everyone has a chance to answer...it all ties in.

The acquisition of vocabulary and concepts about teaching is also apparent in the stimulated interview data. Teachers used terms like "checking" or "checking for understanding", "modeling", "reviewing", and "guided" or "independent practice" to explain what or why they were doing something. In most professions the ability to label a particular behavior as having a particular function or purpose is one indication that the behavior is understood and internalized. In this case, teachers were able to identify their behavior and to articulate its function within an instructional setting. Further, one teacher provided a "principled reason" for her behavior. That is, she explained why she did not do what she would typically do. When talking about a brainstorming activity she stated:

> Normally, I would have had them write on the board themselves because that frees me up to be talking to them and not have my back to them. But on a day when they're so draggy it just breaks down the flow of the lesson--getting them to come up to the board. (SP 9)

Although only one teacher provided this kind of principled comment, it is much more indicative of the reasoning of competent professionals than of beginning teachers.

Issues of Isolation and Collegiality

Feelings of isolation across both grade levels and building lines were broken down as seminar participants developed friendships and saw other members as a support system for "venting" feelings and oftentimes "solving" difficult teaching problems. The friendships and trust level developed in the group allowed members the opportunity to acknowledge that "teaching is difficult" without being fearful that others might think less of them as teachers. Developing this level of support and trust is viewed as important, because beginning teachers often perceive that asking for help is potentially embarrassing and stigmatizing--it means acknowledging lack of competence (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Another positive change is evidenced in the support generated between seminar group members which crossed school building lines. Participants reported phoning one another to talk about ideas gleaned from the meetings, and further that they sent activity units through district mail to one another. They reported that when they saw one another at district meetings such as staff development activities or curriculum committees there was an "instant positive feeling", a "sharing", a "common bond" that reminded them that they were not alone, not isolated. The data indicate that all participants acquired a sense of not being alone and that this was due primarily to the existence of a collegial support group. All acknowledged that it was okay to admit an incomplete understanding and to ask for help. The following examples from participant interviews support these conclusions:

SP 4: I think it's nice to listen to people who are maybe [experiencing] the same kinds of problems that you have and ....[you know] everybody wants to be thought of as a super teacher -'I don't have any problems' but I think it's [important to] break those barriers so people can open up and start [sharing] expertise in different areas....I think you really need to ask for help and you kind of have to, again, let your guard down a little bit and just start to say, 'I need some help'.

SP 6: In this group we can say 'I feel weak in this area, can you help me?' and I think that was really good.

SP 8: [People] were a little bit afraid at first [and then] you begin to find out that some of the problems you had other people were having too and people came up with some suggestions [for problem solving]....I think once you realize that other people are having the same problems that you feel more comfortable.

SP 9: We had support from each other. It was good to hear somebody else who had problems like you had or made mistakes....You didn't feel like you were the only one that was out there....I thought if I could live through this year that I could get through anything. Sometimes you hate to have that attitude, but here I am at the bottom and anything looks good from here.

Most of the participants, when interviewed, commented on the overcoming of "new-teacher isolation" through the seminar process. The availability of a group "in the same boat" (that is, being a new teacher) helped participants feel comfortable communicating with their peers the frustrations as well as the joys of the first year of teaching. After two years in the seminar experience one of the teachers summed up the experience saying:

SP2: [seminar meetings] really helped with the panic that you feel as a new teacher. You feel like you have to be an expert right away because you have all this education behind you. But in studying and then getting that kind of research to use, we learned that, "Yes, it's time for us to start building toward being an expert, but we are not

over our novice stage yet; and we don't have to panic, because, you know, it takes time"

Later she added:

I'd like to put in a plug for the seminar to keep going.... it's a great opportunity for teachers to talk to one another.

Almost all other seminar participants echoed this sentiment. The opportunity to talk with one another, to share and problem solve was viewed as a valuable growth experience by all.

An Understanding of Teaching as a Profession

Seminar participants moved toward a more comprehensive understanding of teaching. Over the course of the seminar, participants began to use a professional vocabulary and to develop reflective practices. In other words, they began to acknowledge that teaching was not a series of discrete events or activities but an interconnected set of skills, that it is both art and science. Participants, then, were developing pedagogical skills as they moved along the continuum toward becoming competent professionals. The following statements from interviews support this conclusion:

SP 2: We talked about the language of teaching...I think more deeply now, I give myself more time to think.

SP 6: It gave me time to sit back and think and to really evaluate myself....time to reflect.

SP 7: [Before] I really never sat down and [thought about teaching]. I knew in the back of my mind that you were supposed to do that. But it never came to the front. And this one time I finally put that all together and said, 'Wow, maybe if I did that it would run better.' So that helped, finally just sitting down and figuring it out...for me it was nice to just get out there and talk professional, because that's not the kind of talk you get in the faculty lounge.

If reflective thinking about one's profession can be construed as an effort to be better at it, then this seminar group definitely tried to get better. During the seminar meetings, teachers focused on the professional aspects of teaching and the influence the seminar was having in terms of developing a professional attitude. One teacher reported, "At my school we talk about, well--we [complain]. We talk about Bobby reversing his numbers and what should I do? But we don't talk about what teaching is." This teacher was beginning to develop an understanding that teaching was more than figuring out what to do about an individual student and his or her learning problem. She recognized that teaching involves both philosophy and practice; the seminar experience allowed her the opportunity to reflect upon the implications of each. Others, too, acknowledged the value of the seminar in helping them to become better teachers. Interviews following the second year of the program are full of comments about the value of getting together and "talking teaching"--talking about solving specific problems, talking about instructional methods, talking about "good research" and its implications for classroom instruction.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teachers learn to teach through a university preservice-teacher training program. Once a teacher is hired by a school district inservice training is the responsibility of that district. It appears that one way to provide support to beginning teachers is through a professional development seminar--we believe it was effective for these teachers in terms of breaking down feelings of isolation and developing a deeper understanding of and commitment to teaching. Teachers developed collegial relationships among seminar group members which crossed content areas, grade levels, and building boundaries. These relationships facilitated the development of a forum where problems could be solved and risk-taking was encouraged. When new instructional strategies didn't work the first time they were tried, participants were encouraged by group members to "try again", perhaps in a different way, rather than viewing themselves or the new methods as failures. In this

sense teachers shared their questions and learned from one another. Over time, a common vocabulary emerged as teachers became aware of research based findings and discussed ways to integrate research-based knowledge with practical knowledge about teaching. Finally, teachers moved towards a greater understanding of and conceptualization of teaching as more than discrete management techniques or instructional events.

For these teachers the Professional Development Seminar addressed the difficulties of being a novice: barriers of isolation were broken down and participants shared experiences with one another, thereby learning from each other. Time was provided for reflection--it was expected of these novices. In that sense, we believe this structured opportunity for teachers to talk--the Professional Development Seminar--provides necessary support for teachers as they move toward becoming competent professionals.

Hunter recently wrote, "The only thing an educator must do is think, using research-validated principles, emerging data, and intuition" (1990, p. xii). We believe this seminar experience both allowed and required teachers to do just that. We would urge its adoption by other districts searching for ways to help beginning teachers into the profession.

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Table 1

Stage	Level	Distinctive Features
I	Novice	--use context-free rules --behavior is and relatively inflexible --real-world experiences more important than verbal information
II	Advanced Beginner	--experience begins to be integrated with verbal information --context begins to guide behavior
III	Competent	--conscious choices about instructional priorities and activities --instructional decisions made within context of content and students --feel more responsible for what is happening
IV	Proficient	--"intuitive" sense of classroom develops --recognizes and understanding interrelationship of classroom events --analytic and deliberative in deciding what to do
V	Expert	--demonstrate an intuitive understanding of the situation and an appropriate response --demonstrates automaticity --they do things that usually work, only when something atypical happens do they bring deliberate analytic processes to bear on the situation

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